

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Welcome to the 21st Century. You are a Netizen (a Net Citizen), and you exist as a citizen of the world thanks to the global connectivity that the Net makes possible. You consider everyone as your compatriot. You physically live in one country but you are in contact with much of the world via the global computer network. Virtually, you live next door to every other single Netizen in the world. Geographical separation is replaced by existence in some virtual space. (Hauben, 1997, cited by Kearsley, 2000, p.124)

Since its first appearance in the early 1990s, the World Wide Web has bridged transactions that once had to happen face-to-face, such as information sharing, personal communication, international trade and education. Regarding education, students nowadays do not need to attend a physical campus or a classroom, for the Internet has become a core channel linking them with instructors, and other classmates online.

Dilemma: the Equal Opportunity or the Loophole

The Information Marketplace will change the role of schools, universities, and the educational community. One of the more obvious effects will be the simultaneous expansion of the students market for schools and the school market for students. Why study at a local school, training center, or university if you can attend at a distance, the best school for your particular interests? (Dertouzos, 1997, cited by Kearsley, 2000, p.137)

E-Learning expands an educational opportunity since it outreaches to the underprivileged, the disabled, the poor and the rich (Adams & DeFleur, 2006). This new alternative gives an opportunity to the less privileged people because it allows them to earn a degree without having to leave their homes or countries. They can study anywhere, anytime online. There is also a great scope for online degrees in the

future, especially for students interested in earning a degree abroad. Hence, an online degree will build a culture of life-long learning for the society at large. Dutton and Perry (2002) exemplify the reasons why people choose to earn an online degree. Firstly, they can avoid conflict between their studies and other commitments, such as childcare, work, and travel time. Secondly, by studying online, they will also have more flexibility in choosing courses. Also, Kearsley (2000) highlights that eLearning encourages more interactive participation. Students can simply communicate with many students or even directly with the instructors from different places via email and Internet conferencing. Also, the students can even create a virtual community, containing people with the same interests. Next, students can access banks of online resources, such as databases and research studies. Besides, an online degree is cost saving. A company can save time and cut down on costs as they do not have to send their employees to attend a physical campus. Finally, an online degree offers students more flexibility than a regular degree does. That is, instructors can facilitate the teaching while students take responsibility to study the content, do assignments or projects on their own. It is noted that this liberation and freedom from classroom boundaries requires students to be self-disciplined and mature as they can determine and control the direction by their own attendance and activities.

Even though gaining a higher education will increase better career opportunities, a number of research studies show that it is not always applicable for online degree holders. In the “Future of Online Teaching and Learning”, Kim and Bonk (2008) mentioned that some people have perceived the degree wrongly. They questioned the effectiveness of technologies, instructors, readiness and challenges to meet the demands of online learners.

Adams (2007) reciprocates that online degrees are often viewed with skepticism. Firstly, Wallen (2006) indicates that the quality of online study is perceived as inferior to a traditional degree. It can lead to an “easy” degree, marketed by the profit-oriented institutions, in terms of less difficult work (Adam, 2007). For example, Phoenix University, U.S.A., was fined \$9.8 million for overaggressive student recruitment (Wallen, 2006). Secondly, the low completion rates and other failures in distant education have continued to degrade the quality as some less disciplined students can neither follow the lessons, nor complete the assignments on

time. Next, online education does not contain a face-to-face communication between students, their teachers and their classmates (Keagan, 1993). Adams (2007) indicates that managers think online degree holders miss valuable opportunities in experiencing teamwork, learning from their peers and interacting with teachers. These skills are considered important at work. Lastly, managers perceive that studying from a computer at home is not compatible with real classroom experience. From these disadvantages, an online degree is not equally perceived as having the same values for their companies' needs.

According to these controversial issues, this study focuses on whether the recruiters value skills, knowledge and experience as the most important criteria, no matter what type of degree the students obtain.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This cross-sectional study is to find out whether recruiters see online degrees as having the same value for their company's needs as degrees earned in a traditional lectured program. The research will focus on candidates receiving online degrees both from abroad and in Thailand.

1.2.1 What are the attitudes of recruiter towards candidates with an online degree?

1.2.2 Do the managers view candidates with an online degree differently from the ones with a traditional degree?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1.3.1 Main Objective

This research aims to show what the managers or hiring managers' attitudes are towards the competencies of candidates with online degrees.

1.3.2 Sub-objectives

1. To investigate whether recruiters are more negative to the competencies of candidates with online degree
2. To prove whether managers prefer traditional degree holders to online degree holders.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS / VARIABLES AND DEFINITIONS

Definitions of the terms for this study are the following:

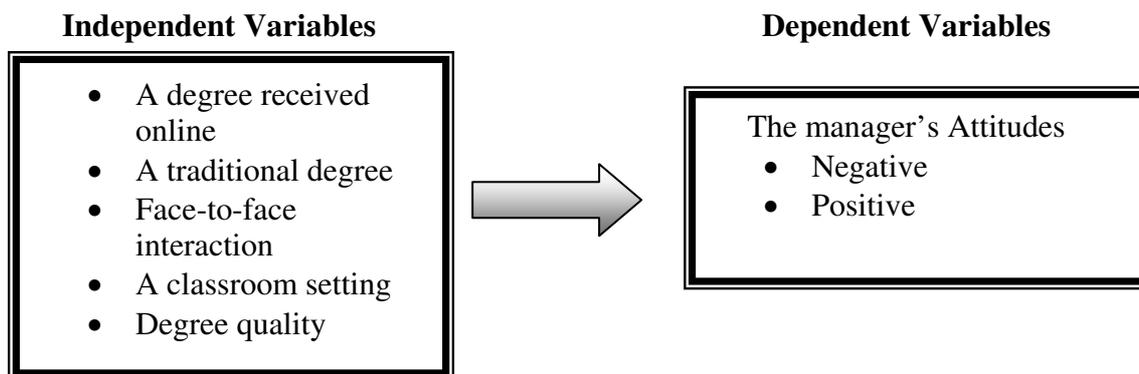
Variables	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Indicator
A candidate with an online degree	A person who studied online and graduated from a virtual university	A person who can study outside the campus and other places, without a fixed classroom schedule, or a face-to-face interaction with friends and instructors.	The number of enrollments in an online degree course
Manager	A leader of a department in a company	A person who has the authority to make any important decisions, supervising subordinates, or can recommend to hire an employee	The number of subordinates under his/her supervision
Work competencies	Abilities to perform jobs	An ability to prioritize, accomplish work well	-Assessment from a company -Reference from supervisors -Promotion and reward

Variables	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Indicator
Work experience	Expertise in a specific field or career	A skillful person who knows how to perform tasks; cope with problems; meet deadlines, and accomplish goals	The number of years which a person has been employed in the position
Face-to-face interaction	A direct correspondence or response between two people	A person who can meet or respond with another party directly without using any media, such as a telephone, Internet, etc.	-Frequency of communications per day - A direct access to contact other fellows
Peer interaction	Communication with a friend	Ways of discussing, tutoring, working with classmates	The number of activities attended together -An opportunity to contact other fellows
Socialization	Having activities with other classmates during or after class	Joining social activities, such as birthday parties, trips, or visits	-Frequency of social activities -An opportunity to join an activity

Variables	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Indicator
Virtual campus	A university of which is not physically present	A university that offers online degrees which the students do not have to come to the university. They study via the Internet	A university without a registered address, or a permanent setting
Traditional campus	A university which is physically present	An existing university which requires students' physical attendance	A tangible university with a registered address which requires its students to study at the campus
E-Learning	An Internet-based learning system	A distance learning system which utilizes advantages of e-mail, teleconference, and VDO for educational purposes	-Education which relies mainly on the Internet
Recruiting	Hiring decisions	The decision made to select a new member to join an organization	Job announcement in newspapers, notice board, or the Internet

Variables	Conceptual Definition	Operational Definition	Indicator
Degree credibility	An educational acceptance from the public	-A provable and verifiable qualification and attributes	-An accreditation system by a certain standard
Attitudes	The way a person thinks or feels about a certain thing	A way of perceiving a person's qualification, capabilities or merits	-Likert Scale -Interview -Survey

Dependent and Independent Variables



1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research conducted with managers who were currently graduate students at Thammasat University, University of Thai Chamber of Commerce and Kasetsart University. The total population was approximately 290. However, the target subject was 100. The study lasted from 8-20 December 2008.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of this study:

1.6.1 This research will be beneficial for online degree students and those considering taking an online degree, regarding the perception of their prospective employers towards their competencies.

1.6.2 The findings will discover whether the type of degree received affects any hiring decisions.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This research study is divided into five chapters, as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction: Background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, variables and definitions, and significance of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review: relevant theories, concepts about online degrees, recruitment and previous similar research on attitudes towards the candidates with an online degree.

Chapter Three: Methodology: population, materials, procedures, and data analysis.

Chapter Four: Results of the Study: the results collected and analyzed from the questionnaires.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Discussion and Recommendations: the summary of the study and conclusions of the findings, and recommendations for further study.